

DCB WEB PAGE TEAM

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RESPONSIBILITIES

It is very clear to me that building and maintaining a web site (even a small one) is a significant undertaking. There are many skills required to do a good job and many tasks that need to be performed - some regularly and some occasionally. There are a couple of ways to handle the problem. One is to have somebody's primary responsibility be to set up and maintain the site. This choice is not particularly desirable in DCB for several reasons. First, it is unlikely an AST will be given a 14 or 15 for administering a web site. Second, the administrator should really be involved in branch business on a day to day basis and a task order contract would not work well. Third, the generation of content must be the responsibility of the researchers who create the results.

Another way to approach the site administration issue is to distribute the tasks and skills around the branch to those who can best perform the various functions.

Below is a suggested breakdown that I adapted from *How to Set Up and Maintain a World Wide Web Site (The Guide for Information Providers)* by Lincoln D. Stein.

Proposed Division of Labor

Distribute the web site administration across the organization with four key functions - administrator, webmaster(s), authors, and script developer(s). This distribution separates the key functions (and skills) of administering a web site in a manner very consistent with the organization of DCB.

Administrator - The administrator is responsible for keeping the hardware and software operating including upgrades, backups, configuration mods, etc. In addition, the administrator monitors and reports on usage and handles security issues (passwords, access restrictions, etc.). Most likely this person would be the current systems administrator.

Webmaster(s) - The webmaster is responsible for keeping the site together and serving as the point of contact for users. The webmaster ensures that the content is presented in accordance with the style and layout guidelines for

the site. The webmaster might also arrange and modify the content according to the guidelines. Finally, the webmaster is responsible for handling "customer service" issues and directing comments, suggestions, and questions to the appropriate people. I propose breaking this function into two sub-functions - a) everyday stuff such as handling customer service issues and moving and altering content and b) oversight stuff such as establishing guidelines and templates and coordinating site layout. The day to day could be handled by a clerical/administrative assistant and the oversight by a researcher or manager. The oversight manager would also most likely lead the standing web oversight committee that would meet regularly (e.g., semi-annually) to address issues such as mission and role of the site, budget and resource allocation, standards for look and feel, style guide modifications, and template approval.

The committee would consist of the web officers (Administrator and Webmasters) and representatives from the staff (authors and managers).

Author(s) - The authors are the key to the success of the site because they produce the content. The availability of very high powered HTML editing software and associated tools for graphics, animation, and other multimedia is increasing almost daily and anybody who can use a word processor can build a web page. With the help of these software tools, a style guide and templates for common content types every researcher can develop content for the site. I propose that each researcher be required to contribute to the site on a regular basis to maintain a current, interesting, and informative web site. New content would have to be reviewed like any other publication. (Note that web content might achieve much higher circulation than traditional publications and so quality, both technical and grammatical, is very important.)

Script Developer(s) - Script developers write programs to extend the capabilities of the site such as enabling electronic forms, image maps (i.e., pictures with hot spots linked to other content), and other interactive features. Scripting is one area that is undergoing rapid change. Most of the new developments on the web such as Java, Shockwave, ActiveX, and other multimedia involve scripting in some sense. On the other hand the HTML editors will make adding advanced web technologies to pages easier all the time. In addition, there are many "standard" scripts readily available. I imagine that the task of developing scripts can be handled by contractors under task assignments but that some authors might do some script development (as may the administrator or webmasters).